

Macbeth lists

Important information you might include
in an essay

Macbeth himself

- Noble before he meets the witches
- Use quotes “brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name” – Sergeant in 1.2
- “Valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!” – Duncan in 1.2
- 1.3 echoes the words of the witches “So fair and foul a day I have not seen”
- Not completely evil as we hear his soliloquys – Shakespeare still wants us to see things from his perspective
- Once he makes a conscious decision to be evil his soliloquies cease.
- “Full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!” – animal imagery to show his deterioration
- “you lack the season of all natures, sleep!” – suffers from insomnia which probably contributes to his madness

Lady Macbeth herself

- Not totally evil as she has to ask for help to commit evil deeds
- Asks spirits to take away her feminine attributes so she can egg her husband on
- Manipulates Macbeth to kill Duncan
- Is consumed by her guilt in the end
- She regrets killing Duncan and loses sleep like her husband – shows she has a conscience
- Helps us understand theme of appearance vs reality
“Look like the innocent flower...” and “false face must hide what the false heart doth know”
- “What’s done cannot be undone” – tries to get on with things although sleepwalks and ultimately goes mad
- “Will these hands ne’er be clean?” 5.1

Soliloquy

- Helps us to understand a character from a personal perspective
- Creates sympathy for characters
- Show us what they're going through
- Shows us what characters are really like
- MACBETH: soliloquys cease as MB chooses an evil path
- At first, his soliloquys show us he is not completely evil
- Shows his fatal flaw – ambition – from the very beginning
- Shakespeare no longer wants to create sympathy for him

Imagery

- Sickness - Shakespeare gives us the idea of Scotland as a sick country because Macbeth has made it so with his evil deed. Macbeth himself is the plague although he ironically asks the doctor to “administer to a mind diseased”
- Robes and garment s- show us MB's not suited to role of king
- Blood imagery – fits in with evil theme and tone. “I am in blood...” consciously chooses path of evil so MB speaks using bloody imagery
- Animalistic imagery – MB begins to refer to animals more to show us his humanity has decreased
- Light and dark – most deaths occur at night or in dark / shadowy places. MB and Lady invoke dark spirits – MB actively seeks out the witches

Setting

- Most foul actions occur in dark or at night-time
- Play opens on a deserted heath – with witches. This first scene gives the whole play an evil tone
- Dunsinane – Duncan's original castle into which MB moves into
- MB came from Inverness but soon moves to Dunsinane
- Birnam Wood gets taken up to Dunsinane

Dramatic irony

- Speaker is given information that at least one character is unaware of
- This places audience a step ahead of them
- It can create sympathy for characters or exposes more of their characteristics (Duncan – kind and trusting king)
- Adds suspense / excitement
- Macbeth plotting King's murder while he is staying in his castle
- Lady Macbeth greeting Duncan at the door
- Duncan “fear and noble hostess” said to Lady MB – ironic as she is planning to kill him
- “This castle hath a pleasant seat” – adds to drama as audience knows its where he will die!

Character foils

- Shakespeare uses minor characters to contrast major ones, e.g: Duncan, Banquo, Macduff. He uses them to highlight MB's bad points. We see through other characters how evil he is
- They have some similar qualities but huge differences – Shakespeare wants to highlight their differences
- (Shakespeare provides Macbeth with two foils – Macduff and Banquo – to emphasise how evil our main character is. He wants us to look at these fine examples of Elizabethan manhood and compare them to Macbeth, the usurper of Elizabethan values)
- Duncan shows us what a good king should look like.
- Witches act as a messenger for death. Have both similarities and differences to MB. Both are superstitious, but MB not completely evil like witches until he chooses an evil path. He also regrets this ultimately and somewhat redeems himself at end.

Dialogue

- ◉ Shows us what others think about a character
- ◉ Shows us how different characters relate
- ◉ Shows us the difference between what characters say to each other and what they say to themselves
- ◉ e.g: “Valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!”

The style of language used

- ◉ Rhyming can be used to show evil
- ◉ Witches speak in 'demented nursery rhymes'
- ◉ "By the pricking of thy thumbs,
something wicked this way comes"
- ◉ Can be used to show status. Macbeth gets the best poetry of the play

Foreshadowing

- Witches prophecies foreshadow later events.
- Macduff's suspicions of Macbeth foreshadow his later suspicions of Macbeth
- Duncan's trust in Thane of Cawdor who betrayed him COULD be seen as foreshadowing of NEW Thane of Cawdor – Macbeth! – who eventually kills him
- (Macbeth's first words give us an idea of what he will become – someone who seems fair becoming foul. Lady Macbeth and Macbeths' paranoia becoming real – the bloody hand foreshadowing the 'damned spot!' and Macbeth's visions that 'Macbeth shall sleep no more' preceding his insomnia)